

Montana Department of Livestock

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For Immediate Release

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Equine WNV now confirmed in five Montana counties

Horses in Cascade, Glacier, Phillips, and Yellowstone Counties as well as a second horse in Flathead County have been confirmed with West Nile Virus (WNV), for a total of six equine WNV cases this season, according to Montana Assistant State Veterinarian Dr. Jeanne Rankin.

The first confirmed case, a 2-year old stallion was not vaccinated and was euthanized. Typically approximately one third of clinically affected horses die. Since the first confirmed equine WNV case in 2002 (134 confirmed cases), the total number of infected horses in Montana is 354 with 118 deaths and 333 unvaccinated horses. There have been 10 WNV cases confirmed in 2005 and 11 in 2004. The worst year was 2003 with 193 confirmed cases with the last reported case in late October. The age range of animals infected this year is from a 1½-year-old filly to a seven-year-old stallion, which shows the animal does not have to be older or debilitated to become infected with WNV.

“Historically this is about the time of year when the first cases of WNV appear,” Dr. Rankin explained, “We have had six cases reported so far this year and we can expect to see this run through September and into October.”

“We highly recommend that horse owners talk with their veterinarians about their horses’ risk of getting West Nile Virus and the use of vaccines. It is not too late to vaccinate against West Nile Virus for this year,” Dr. Rankin stressed. “With the WNV season possible into late October, there is still time to complete the recommended two initial vaccinations which are given three to six weeks apart.”

Effective mosquito control and vaccination are the best safety precautions for your animals against the disease. Watering troughs should be cleaned thoroughly and regularly. A variety of water treatment solutions are available that contain natural bacteria that, when put into the water, will kill fly and mosquito larvae, but is nontoxic to animals. For further information contact Greg Johnson, Entomologist at MSU, or your local county extension agent.

Clinical signs of West Nile Virus in horses include loss of appetite and depression, in addition to any combination of weakness or paralysis of hind limbs, muzzle twitching impaired vision, incoordination, head pressing, aimless wandering, convulsions, inability to swallow, circling, hyperexcitability, or coma.

More information about West Nile Virus in horses is available from the Department of Livestock Web site at www.mt.gov/liv. For information regarding the disease in humans visit www.dphhs.mt.gov